

## FODOR'S WALT DISNEY WORLD 2011: UNIVERSAL NEWS

For two decades or so Universal and Disney have been going head-to-head. While Disney creates a fantasy world for people—especially young children—who love fairy tales, Universal Orlando is geared to older kids, adults, and anyone who enjoys high-energy thrills and pop culture, and the movies.

Where Disney may roll out a new land or retrofit an old ride once a decade, Universal knows that guests expect something different each time they visit. And the park delivers. In recent years Universal Studios alone has replaced Alfred Hitchcock with Shrek, Hanna-Barbera with Jimmy Neutron, King Kong with The Mummy, Back to the Future with the virtual-reality Simpsons ride, and Earthquake with Disaster! In 2009 Hollywood Rip Ride Rockit—an interactive roller coaster—was introduced.

Things haven't been static at Islands of Adventure (IOA)—thanks to the opening of the Wizarding World of Harry Potter— or at the City Walk shopping/nightlife complex. A well-intentioned-but-less-than-successful jazz club became a karaoke stage, a Motown restaurant became the Red Coconut Lounge, and a series of stores were switched out to give the complex a new look. In addition, Universal has given the Blue Man Group its very own theater.

A few miles away, on the tourist strip known as International Drive, is Wet 'n Wild—owned by Universal since 1998 and believed to be America's first water park. Wet 'n Wild does with aquatics what Universal does with theatrics: provides over-the-top entertainment, albeit in the form of super waterslides and fantastic plunges. (To wit: Bomb Bay, which drops you 76 nearly-vertical feet down a slide and into the pool. Spooky, splashy fun.) Despite the adrenaline-charging attractions at Wet n' Wild, it's not hard to chill out lazing about the park's beaches and pools. And, at Universal you can slow down with some leisurely shopping at CityWalk; a concert at Hard Rock Live; and a languorous, elegant dinner at Emeril's.

### **What's New**

The biggest news (for a while it seemed to be the only news) is the 2010 opening of the much-anticipated Wizarding World of Harry Potter. The 35-acre land at IOA includes the Forbidden Forest, Hogsmeade Village, and the iconic Hogwarts castle. If you're a Potter fan, the images you created in your mind (which, incredibly, were captured in the movie series) are largely duplicated here. There's the fantastic Hogwarts Express steam train, and Dervish and Banges shop for wizarding supplies (if you need a wand, though, head to Ollivander's). You can even get a Hogsmeade postmark on postcards and letters mailed from the Owl Post. It's quite a world, this Wizarding World. . . .

But there's more to discover at Universal than just this popular new land. Universal never seems to stop re-inventing and reformatting shows and attractions. By the time you arrive, it's entirely possible that there will be fresh attractions based on new cartoon characters and revamped stunt shows and spectacles based on current movie or TV faves. That's the magic of Universal—you never know what they have planned for you next!